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ASH BARTY

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RAFA HOPES TO BREAK FREE, MEDVEDEV STANDS IN WAY

Spaniard can become the first man in history to win 21 Majors but Daniil Medvedev is a sizable obstacle. Here's a look

Fit and fresh, Nadal entered the event with no designs on a title run. He just wanted to enjoy the game after recovering from injuries. But his drive to fight and succeed has given him an opportunity

New challenge

Russian, 10 years Nadal's junior, has been here before. At the US Open, he stopped Novak Djokovic over a quisitions of winning a 21st Slam by beating him in straight sets. His in-game nous and serves make him a strong contender.

Keep an eye on...

Nadal has lost the third set in three of the last four rounds here. At 35, he has shown signs of wear and tear. If he shows the same weaknesses, Medvedev won't need a second invitation.

3-1 Nadal leads Head-to-Head including winning the 2019 US Open final across five sets

TAKING A BREAK TO TENNIS ROYALTY

- Identified as a childhood prodigy, **Ash Barty,** who turned pro in 2010, took a break in 2014 to 'experience life as a normal teenaged girl'. She played domestic cricket before returning to tennis in 2016.
- Ranked No 1 from Sept 2019, Barty was at her dominant best in Melbourne Park. This is her third Major after the French (2019 and Wimbledon (2021) titles. What makes the first Australian to win the Australian Open in 44 years tick is her variety. P15

2005

BEFORE SATURDAY, THE LAST AUSTRALIAN TO PLAY IN A SINGLES FINAL WAS LLEYTON HEWITT

MEN'S FINAL LIVE FROM 2PM

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

WILL THERE BE FIREWORKS IN THIS YEAR'S BUDGET?

SUNITHA NATTI

ANNUAL budgets are all about balancing income and expenditure. But if you happen to be India's finance minister, what's supposed to be a simple arithmetic exercise will be anything but. For Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the problem is even more complex as she presents her fourth budget on Tuesday. It's also India's second pandemic budget and with economic recovery playing hopscotch, one would expect the government to walk the whole nine yards to tackle joblessness and rising distress in the informal economy.

That said, going to market with a cap in hand will unleash the nasty side of investors and rating agencies, for whom even a rupee of extra debt translates to doomsday scenarios. But higher allocations are being sought, rightfully so, for healthcare, education, rural and urban employment schemes, housing programmes, credit guarantees for the worst-hit sectors including MSMEs.

Even though tax collections surprised on the upside this fiscal, the need for market borrowings remains elevated at over ₹12 lakh crore in FY23. As per the medium-term fiscal policy, fiscal deficit is targeted at 4.5% of GDP by FY26, implying an average 60 bps annual reduction. It means deficit will likely squat at 6.3% in FY23.

But RBI, whose ingenuity helped the government borrow at a 17-year low last year, is unlikely to play godfather. Call it a coincidence, but just days ahead of Budget 2022, the central bank conveyed as much.

On Friday, Deputy Governor Michael Patra reasoned it's time for fiscal policy to take over its vanguard role, as the unsung hero RBI returns to its dutiful complementary position. It means RBI will no longer anchor long-term bond rates at the sacrosanct 6% and borrowing rates will rise. In a trailer of sorts, the 10-year benchmark rates have crossed the pre-pandemic 6.7% and Patra's remarks just put across the point in the public domain.

However, none expects a stratospheric jump in government expenditure given Sitharaman's reluctance to spend even during the height of the pandemic. Total expenditure will likely maintain its trendline growth at ₹38 lakh crore. This is also the FM's myth buster that supply-side economics need not include tax cuts or cash transfers, but regulatory measures and efficient allocation of capital and labour are enough. Some will involve short-term costs, but ensure long-term gains, leading to higher output and lower prices. But, these need two things — time and political resolve.

Which is why some believe this budget won't have fireworks, but can stand out by ensuring continuity and with go-to strategies and timelines for initiatives announced in previous budgets. Several announcements remained just that and focusing on their execution will be key. These include privatisation, national infrastructure pipeline, asset monetisation, bad bank, including G-secs in government bond index, and importantly direct tax reforms. P4, P13

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Notification to fill up backlog posts within a week

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

Notifications to fill backlog vacancies in various government departments, universities and other government institutions will be issued within a week and the process will be completed in the next three months.

The Cabinet Sub-Committee for Backlog Vacancies, chaired by Water Resources Minister Govind Karjol, on Saturday directed officials to take measures to start filling up backlog vacancies.

Social Welfare Minister Srinivas Poojary, Municipal Administration Minister MTB Nagaraj, Fisheries Minister S Angara, Animal Husbandry Minister Prabhu Chauhan and Backward Classes Department Minister B Sriramulu are members of the cabinet sub-committee. As many as 446 posts reserved for the Scheduled Castes and 436 posts for Scheduled Tribes are vacant in government colleges, aided technical institutes and universities, according to a statement issued after the committee meeting. P4

Pegasus back to haunt Centre as Parl reconvenes

NYT report claims India voted in Israel's favour at UN after deal in which it bought the spyware

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

IN what can spell trouble for the government during the Budget Session of Parliament, the opposition sought clarification from the Centre over a media report that it bought the Pegasus spyware from Israel in 2017, calling it an act of treason and accusing it of deceiving the House. But the government rubbished the article saying a Supreme Court panel was monitoring the issue and a report was awaited.

An investigative report in *The New York Times* said that India, among other nations, has used the Israeli spyware Pegasus, which it bought in 2017. The government has rejected all allegations levelled against it of using the spyware to snoop on key politicians, judges and journalists, among others.

But the opposition parties attacked the government following the latest revelations and are likely to corner it in both Houses of Parliament during the session starting on Monday. The Monsoon Session last year turned out to be a complete washout over the same issue.

Calling it a "brazen, hijack of democracy", the Congress on Saturday said it would reach out to like-minded opposition parties to question the government on the floor of the House as it had "deceived Parliament" by saying that it did not buy the spyware. "Modi Govt bought Pegasus to spy on our primary democratic institutions, politicians and public. Govt functionaries, opposition leaders, armed forces, judiciary all were targeted by these phone tappings. This is treason. Modi Govt has committed treason," tweeted Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who was also on the list of people reportedly being snooped using the spyware.

The Left parties said the Centre stood exposed as it tried to hide the truth and its silence meant an acceptance of "criminal activity". CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury said: "The Modi government must explain on affidavit why it bought this cyber weapon, who gave the permission for its usage, how were the targets selected and who got these reports?"

But some ministers dismissed the *NYT* report. "Can you trust NYT? They are known as Supari Media," tweeted Union minister Gen (retd) V K Singh. The BJP denied any role in snooping and said it was a "concocted hack story".

The report said that after the deal between the two nations, India voted in support of Israel at the UN's Economic and Social Council in 2019 to deny observer status to a Palestinian human rights organisation. But this was dismissed as "utter rubbish" by India's former permanent representative to the UN, Syed Akbaruddin.

A student with a mask below her chin tries to board a bus in Bengaluru on Saturday. The government has decided to reopen schools in the city from Monday | SHRIRAM BN

Bengaluru schools to restart offline classes from Monday

DONNA EVA @ Bengaluru

ALL Bengaluru schools will be reopened from Monday (January 31) with Covid-related guidelines in place, announced the government on Saturday after a cabinet meeting. Primary and Secondary Education Minister BC Nagesh had argued for reopening of offline classes, saying the education department is prepared.

"Grades from 1 to 9 will start offline classes. If any positive case is found, only that particular class will be closed and not the entire school. All children in that class will be tested for Covid. Depending on the total number of positive cases, the deputy commissioner will decide on how long a school should be closed - three or five days," Nagesh explained. Welcoming the decision, Shashi Kumar, general secretary for the Associated Managements of English Medium Schools in Karnataka, said, "We are happy that the government has taken the decision. All schools must definitely follow a strict and tight SOP to ensure that children are safe." P3

Night curbs lifted, nod for full seating in hotels

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

NIGHT curfew will be lifted across the state from Monday as there has been a decline in Covid numbers, the state government announced on Saturday. After Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai met ministers and experts from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Revenue Minister R Ashoka told the media, "We have good news for the public. From January 31, there won't be a night curfew."

He said, "The recovery rates are increasing and the severity is less this time. Public transport, pubs, restaurants and government offices can operate at full seating capacity."

Restaurant and pub owners' associations had submitted requests to the state government requesting relaxation as the night curfew was impacting their businesses and livelihoods. Cinema halls and multiplexes, swimming pools, gyms and sports stadiums have been allowed to operate at 50 percent capacity. Religious places will be opened for daily rituals and the public will be allowed as per Covid protocol.

RESTRICTIONS GO

- Pubs, bars, clubs, hotels to function with 100% seating capacity
- Cinema halls, multiplexes, auditoriums and theatres can operate with 50% capacity
- Marriages are allowed with 300 guests in open spaces 200 in closed spaces

The existing rule of allowing only 50 people inside the temple at a time will also be in force, while sevas will be allowed. But the ban on cultural festivals and political meetings will continue.

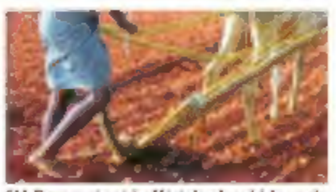
The cap on the number of guests at functions has been increased. "For marriages, 200 to 300 guests will be allowed in open spaces, and from 100 to 200 in closed spaces," Ashoka said. Government offices that were asked to function at 50 per cent strength will return to full attendance, he added. P3

Doubling income: Govt to survey farmer families

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE state government plans to conduct a massive survey of the farmer-families in a bid to come up with tailor-made income enhance programme for each, instead of pushing a top-down one-size-fits-all scheme. This survey data would, ostensibly, be used for 'doubling farmer's income'.

Chairing the first meeting of the Secondary Agriculture Directorate, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Saturday said that after the survey, a plan should be evolved based on land and human resources available with each farmer's family. The survey will be conducted in four districts on a pilot basis, by officials from agriculture, horticulture, rural development and other departments, he said. Though the Secondary Agriculture Directorate is attached to the Agriculture Department, it will work independently and look at agriculture practises, comprehensively. Also include fisheries, animal husbandry and other initiatives that can help farmers supplement their income, he told officials.


CM Bommai said officials should launch a digital platform to foster exports and expand markets for farmers | EXPRESS

The focus should be on efficient use of land and farming practises that are not labour intensive, but technology dependent. There should be a tie-up with local farmer produce organisations to find markets for new produce.

The CM directed, officials to launch a digital platform to foster exports and expand the markets for farmers. P4

Hero farmer gets his hand on pick-up truck

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

Kempegowda with his vehicle at his farm

KEMPEGOWDA, a 27-year-old farmer from Tumakuru, has got his hand on a brand new Bolero Pick-up 1.7 truck. He had become an internet sensation last week after he barged into a Mahindra showroom with cash in hand asking the staff to deliver him the vehicle on the spot. What made netizens root for him was the fact that he had been humiliated just a few hours earlier by the showroom staff, who had allegedly told him that he would not be able to afford a vehicle that cost nearly Rs 10 lakh.

Kempegowda's derring-do of January 21 had reached up to Mahindra Chairman Anand Mahindra. Kempegowda was not aware of it, but he is happy that "the showroom people behaved well with me after the incident. They also helped me get a Rs 7.40 lakh loan from Mahindra Finance to buy the jeep. I have made a down payment of Rs 1.99 lakh and will repay the loan amount in 48 EMIs of Rs 19,000 per month." Kempegowda, who also works as driver for additional income, owned a luggage carrier auto and wanted an upgrade, and that was when the incident occurred. P5

AMBANI A FRONTRUNNER

Delhi's iconic Hotel Ashok up for sale

SHAHID FARIDI @ New Delhi

THE Centre has decided to privatise Delhi's iconic Hotel Ashok, located barely a few hundred metres from the prime minister's residence in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi's diplomatic enclave—Chanakyapuri.

Sources said the Union tourism ministry and the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) are working on a Cabinet note to give the sprawling 25-acre property on a long lease of 90 years. The property consists of a 300-room hotel, service apartments, shopping mall, standalone restaurants, pubs and an upmarket health club.

The leasing of Hotel Ashok is expected to fetch close to a billion dollars for the government. Sources said the Cabinet note is being prepared in consultation with the PMO, and the sale would be completed by the end of calendar year 2022.

The sprawling Hotel Ashok that is a stone's throw from the PM's residence

Among the frontrunners to acquire it is India's richest man Mukesh Ambani. He has long been looking to own a five-star hotel in New Delhi. There were reports that he planned to buy out the Nandas from Hotel Claridges. But the deal did not fructify. Ambani then invested in Hotel Oberoi, where his wife is now a director. But its control remains with Prithviraj Singh Oberoi. Ambani, sources say, is still looking for a hotel with full control, and Ashok could be a lifetime opportunity. But, due to its prime location, architectural beauty and size, it is sure to attract many other bidders.

The hotel came close to being sold during Vajpayee's government when his son-in-law reportedly tried to take it over through a hospitality venture he was associated with. But the then Union tourism minister Jagmohan put his foot down. He blocked the sale by using the government's commitment that it would not sell any profit-making company. The minister pressed the then acting CMD of ITDC to make sure it made a profit that year. The hotel ended up making an operational profit of a couple of crores.

EXPRESS READ

Bangladesh diplomat in sex chat recalled

Kolkata: A Bangladeshi diplomat posted at the country's deputy high commission here was withdrawn after he allegedly had a sexually explicit chat with an Indian woman. A letter issued by Mohammad Mahmudul Haque, assistant secretary (establishment-I) of the Bangladesh foreign ministry on January 18, asked Muhammad Saniul Kader, the first secretary (political), to leave Kolkata within 24 hours. P9

Amit Shah ridicules SP-RLD alliance

Lucknow: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday scoffed at SP leader and former UP CM Akhilesh Yadav and RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary's display of togetherness and said leaders of these parties will be seen together only till election. He said in the event of government formation, people like Azam Khan and Atiq Ahmad, will take centre stage and Chaudhary will not be seen anywhere. P10

NATIONWIDE	JAN 28	JAN 29
Fresh cases	2,51,209	2,35,532
Recoveries	3,47,443	3,35,989
Deaths	627	871
KARNATAKA	JAN 28	JAN 29
Fresh cases	31,198	33,337
Recoveries	71,092	69,902
Deaths	50	70

JAB-O-METER
TAKE YOUR SHOT
January 28
48,98,149 doses
January 29
53,47,810 doses
TOTAL DOSES
1,65,80,85,536

WITH THIS ISSUE TOP PLANT-BASED LIFESTYLE TRENDS TO ADOPT IN 2022 NATURALLY! PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE